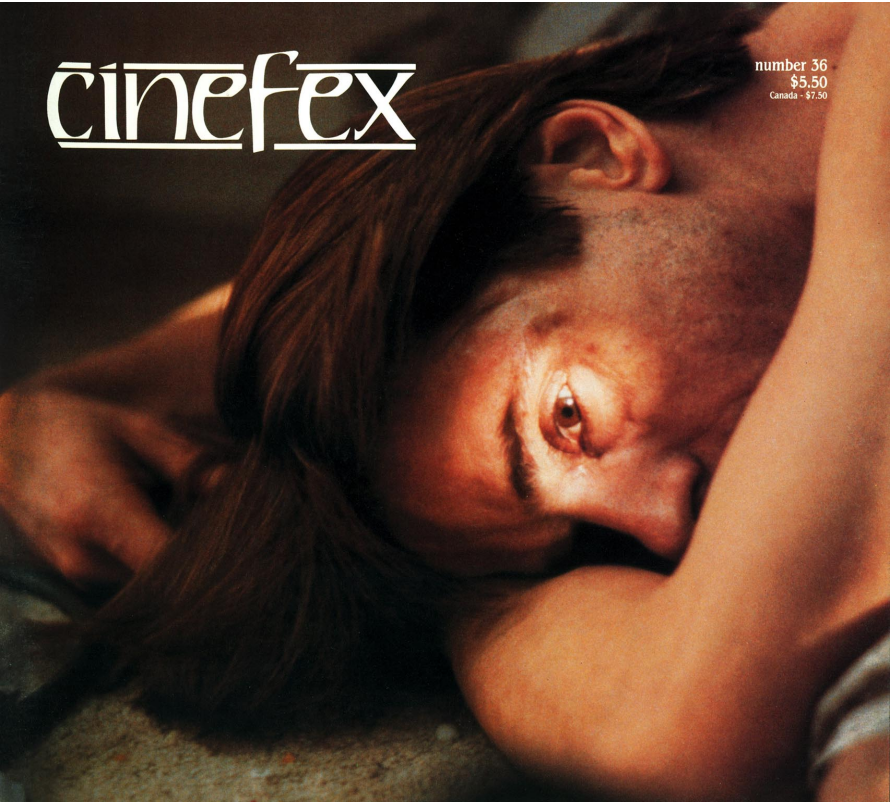




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A Planetful of Aliens 4

To fulfill a need for hundreds of extraterrestrial characters — ranging from principal players to incidental extras — the producers of *Alien Nation* turned to Stan Winston Studios. There — under the direction of Alec Gillis, Shane Mahan, John Rosengrant and Tom Woodruff, with on-set collaboration by Zoltan Elek — was mounted the largest makeup effects show in twenty years. *Article by Ron Magid.*

Exaggerated Reality 18

Even with near-total access to a brand new high-rise office building, the makers of *Die Hard* needed something more to bring their action thriller to the screen. To simulate a bomb blast in an elevator shaft and a giant rooftop explosion and helicopter crash, producer Joel Silver enlisted the services of visual effects producer Richard Edlund and his Boss Film Corporation. *Article by Adam Eisenberg.*

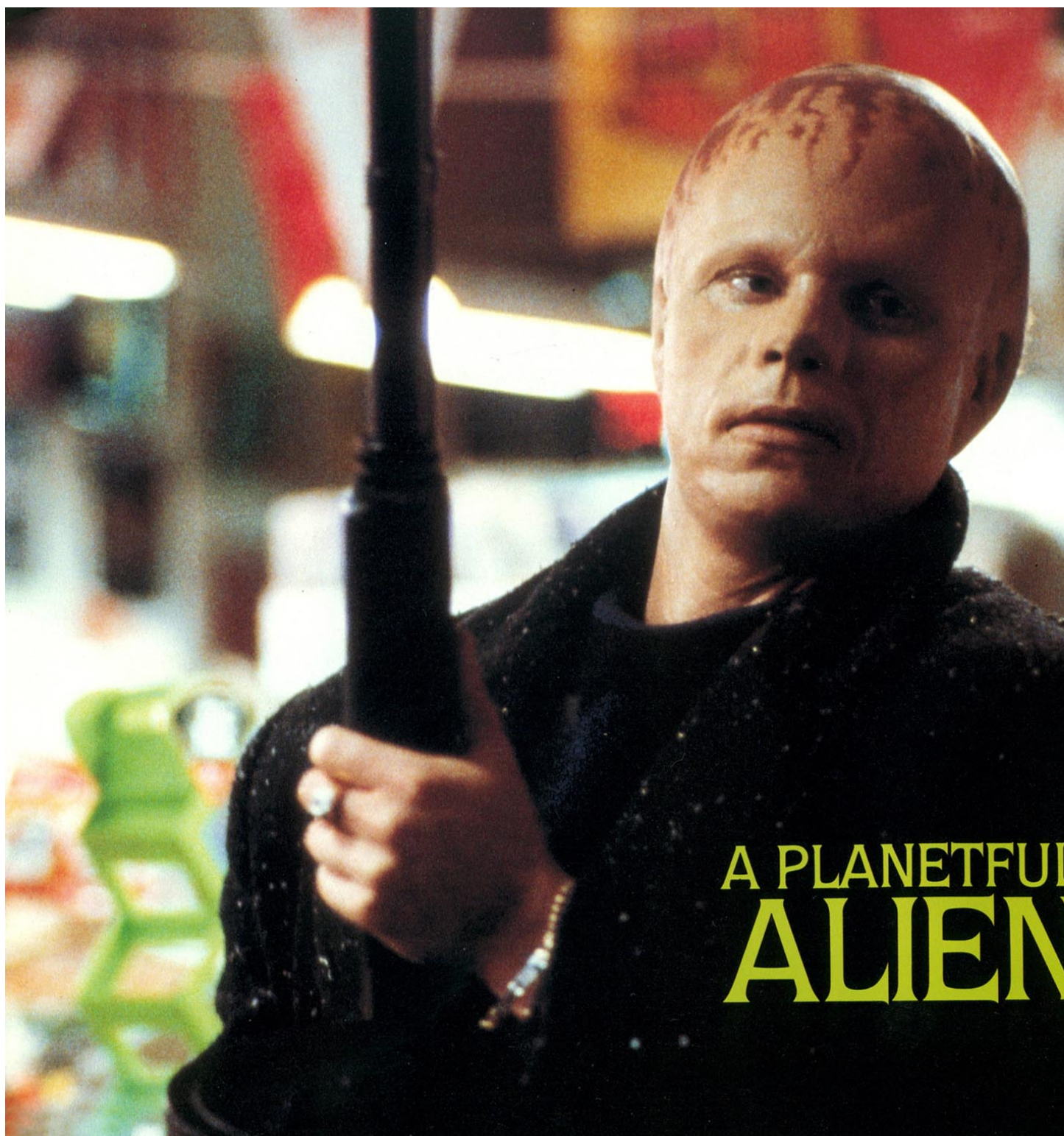
Double Vision 32

On *Dead Ringers* — the latest chiller by horror impresario David Cronenberg — optical effects supervisor Lee Wilson worked with Balsmeyer and Everett and Film Effects of Toronto to create a new generation of split-screen opticals that enabled actor Jeremy Irons to play scenes with himself as twin brothers without the customary restriction of stationary splits or even locked-off cameras. *Article by Don Shay.*

The Right Blob for the Right Job 50

For his updated remake of *The Blob*, director Chuck Russell engaged visual effects production supervisor Michael Fink to oversee an outpouring of cinematic illusions that included gooey creature effects by Lyle Conway and Stuart Ziff, special makeup creations by Tony Gardner and opticals and miniature photography by Hoyt Yeatman and Dream Quest Images. *Article by Robert G. Pielke.*

FRONT COVER — Beverly Mantle lies lifeless at the conclusion of *Dead Ringers*. Alien renegade William Harcourt makes a last stand in *Alien Nation* — BACK COVER.



A PLANETFUL OF
ALIENS

to resemble humans more closely — which means much more delicate work for me than making monsters.' Gale insisted that the designs were being changed and I told her, 'In that case, I'm available.' Ultimately she and the director kept changing things until they almost pushed the aliens too far in the opposite direction — they're almost too human! Their facial structure is completely different, but they still remind us so much of ourselves that we can believe them — which is how I saw them when I first read the script." Ironically, the very changes Elek insisted upon were to cause him considerable aggravation during the shoot, creating one of the most difficult challenges of his career.

Once a generic alien concept was agreed upon and finalized, each of the alien effects coordinators selected a specific area to supervise from beginning to end. Shane Mahan opted to handle the San Francisco makeup for lead actor Mandy Patinkin. John Rosengrant took the supporting character of Cassandra — a female alien and exotic dancer played by Leslie Bevis — and also supervised the small alien son of Francisco. Tom Woodruff selected the character of William Harcourt — an evil alien drug trafficker fronting as a respectable businessman — played by Terence Stamp. Late in the film, Harcourt overdoses on the mind- and body-altering drug he is attempting to manufacture and peddle to his own people — necessitating a transformation suit which became Alec Gillis' primary responsibility. Though certain areas overlapped and the full assignment extended far beyond the principal characters, the supervisory compartmentalization eased the workload considerably.

Sculpting for the principal makeups was technically straightforward. A full head lifecast was taken of each actor, over which the alien appliances were fashioned in clay. Virtually all of the makeups were conceived originally in seven pieces — one each for the neck, chin and forehead, one for each cheek, a combined nose and upper lip piece and a headpiece encasing the ears and the back of the head. The challenge for the artists was to accurately capture the personality of each actor in his or her own makeup. "That was one of the most important things for us," Mahan insisted. "We wanted the audience to be able to recognize the actors immediately. They were all so good, it would have been a shame to cover them up completely." With appliances covering nearly every major facial feature, the task was not as simple as it might seem. "We were very fortunate," remarked Gillis, "in that a lot of the actors had great faces to begin with. The actor who played Trent Porter, for example — Brian Thompson — was a really rugged guy, so he came off looking like a really rough character. On the other hand, Kevyn Major Howard — who played Harcourt's murderous henchman — had very delicate, boyish kind of features, so we used that quality to create a creepy juxtaposition."

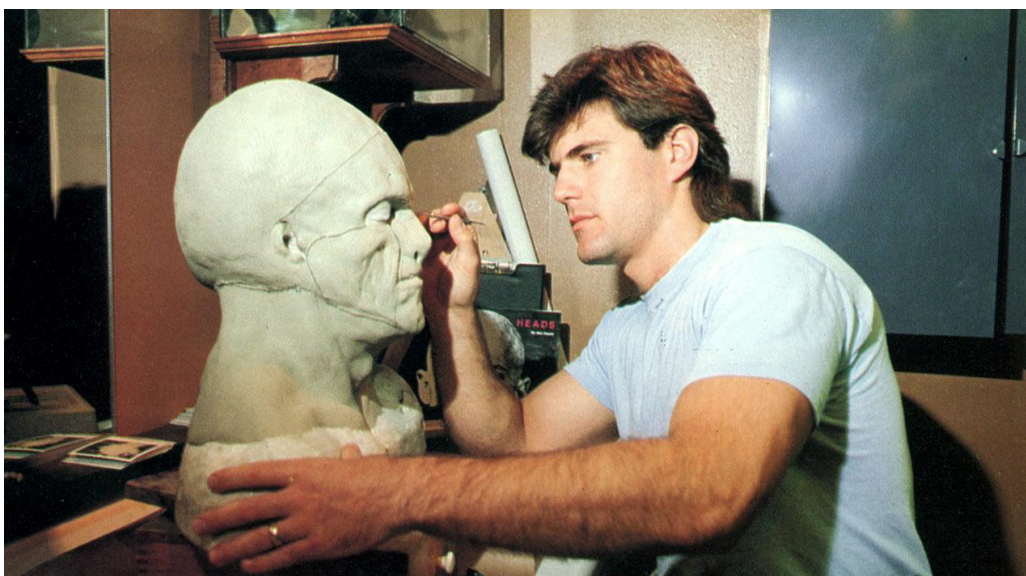




than the yellowish pigment already es agree with me fully in the beginning," the aliens should be a totally different with a lot of yellows, blues and grays. I too monstrous — in fact, we ended up u monster at the climax. But when I did t and this is one of the reasons I love St with him and convinced him to give my 'Okay, you're doing the test, so this wh your hands.' I did my first makeup test o plays the son of an old alien killed in a My first color scheme came out too war ing like a redneck from Texas — but the cameraman liked the general concept, e it toned down. Luckily this meant I was the first test. Unfortunately, this blew o some ninety background masks finished were of a yellowish color, while the tor more orange to the naked eye and phc human skin."

As any makeup artist will attest, the n makeup is one worn by a beautiful won beautiful. In the history of special make ful of these makeups have ever been s the most recent examples being the fin Burman on Nastassia Kinski in *Cat Peo* in *Captain Eo*. Now John Rosengrant can of actress Leslie Bevis into the alien str select number of well-realized female c work," Rosengrant affirmed. "Going int aliens seemed like it was going to be n To duplicate the softness of a woman's — first in clay and then in foam latex- job. You would think just duplicating a simple, but it was one of the most dema ever had to do. Making a beautiful wo a helluva time!"

Rosengrant made his first clay sketch of lifecasts. "I took an old cast Stan ha Tyler Moore and tried to give her face making it ugly. I gave her a different, i structure and also flared and swept bac Baker took a look at my clay sketch a direction to go in, so I just happened female alien." Once Rosengrant was a Bevis' own lifecast, Baker requested tl made even more subtle. "I must have res just to get the right smoothness and a bringing the pieces closer to a human f



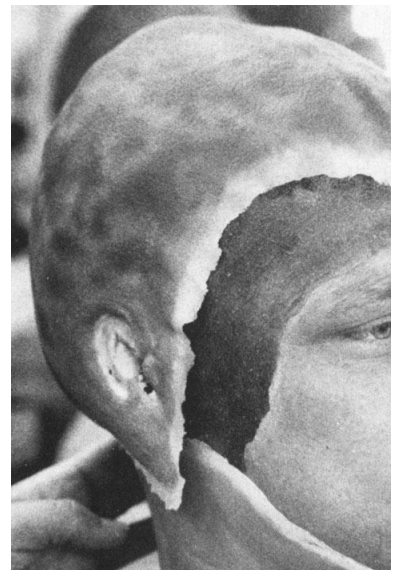
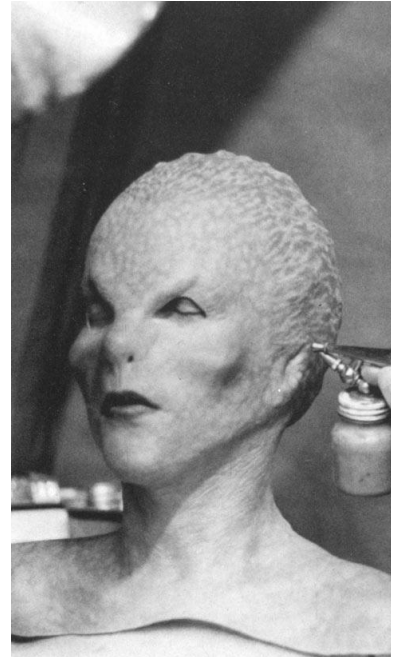
During preproduction, the makeup coordinators were continually urged by director Graham Baker and the producers to refine and revise their alien concepts — making them subtly more human and less extraterrestrial with each successive alteration. Originally the aliens were to be somewhat more serpentine in form and coloration — a look that would prevail to some degree since more than a hundred of the slip-on background masks had already been finished prior to the design change. Matt Rose airbrushes one of the completed masks. / Actor Kevyn Major Howard undergoes the tedious process required to transfigure him into a ruthless killer in the employ of alien drug czar William Harcourt. Most of the characters requiring prosthetic makeups were covered with four basic pieces painstakingly applied and blended on set by Zoltan Elek and a contingent of seasoned makeup artists. / Kipling prepares to execute

made of foam latex and could be glued down to get some expression from the characters in the middleground."

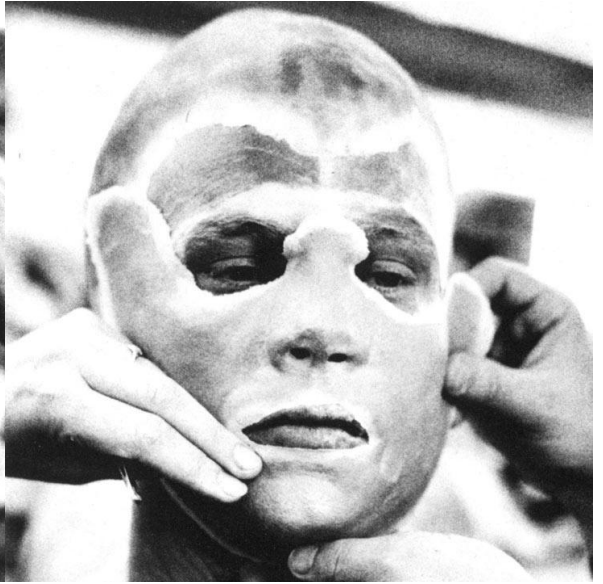
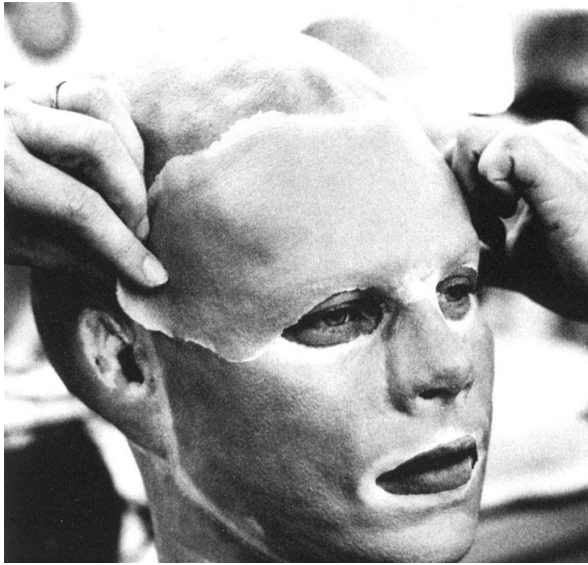
Soon appliances and masks were being manufactured on a production line basis to insure that the vast demand for pieces would be met. "That was the biggest chore," Mahan affirmed, "trying to keep up with the demand. We had a mass production system going on where one person would be assigned to do all the heads, for example. We would pull the pieces out of the oven, fix them up, paint them and have them ready for pickup that afternoon to be taken to the set. The pieces were barely cold when Zoltan and his crew applied them." In this type of high-speed mass production, the headpieces promised to be the Achilles heel that might bring the whole manufacturing process to a standstill. Making those pieces took about as long as any other, but painting them was another matter. Mike Spatola headed up the painting crew charged with maintaining consistency on the many hundreds of prosthetic pieces churned out for the show. Although the aliens were hairless by design, the coordinators decided that they should have spotted skin where hair would be on a human. Thus each alien headpiece had to have a custom-painted spotting pattern that matched with precision to every other headpiece made for that particular character. The situation looked grim until someone came up with a revolutionary idea. "We made vacuformed shells off a plaster copy of each head appliance," Gillis revealed, "then cut out holes in the plastic pieces where the spots would be. It really saved us a helluva lot of time, especially since we could not reuse the headpieces as we had hoped. There was no way to remove them in one piece, so we had to produce a new headpiece for each day's shooting. These templates really saved the day, and I think there's a lot of potential uses for them in other jobs as well."

During one of his first tests, Elek added another unexpected element. "Even though the aliens were supposed to be bald, with only those patterns on their heads, I felt that if we did not add some other texture they would look too rubbery. Stan was one hundred percent against the idea until I tried using chopped hair which produced just a very slight stubble. In fact, when the characters were photographed from the front or the side, you could not actually see the hair — you could only sense a kind of texture on their heads. If the aliens were backlit you could see it, but even then all you could detect was a little fuzz."

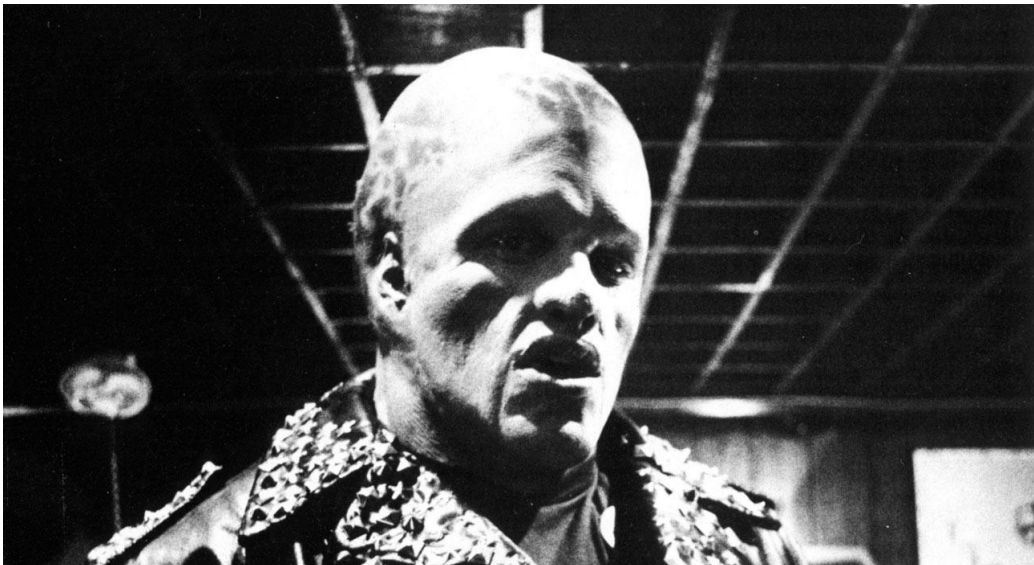
Sadly, some aspects of the alien makeups had to be discarded because they were too uncomfortable for the actors or too time-consuming for the lab crew to make. Contact lenses for the aliens were immediately ruled out because of the large numbers of actors involved, all of whom would have to be specially fitted. Expense aside, it was concluded that the actors would have enough trouble wearing the elaborate makeups without

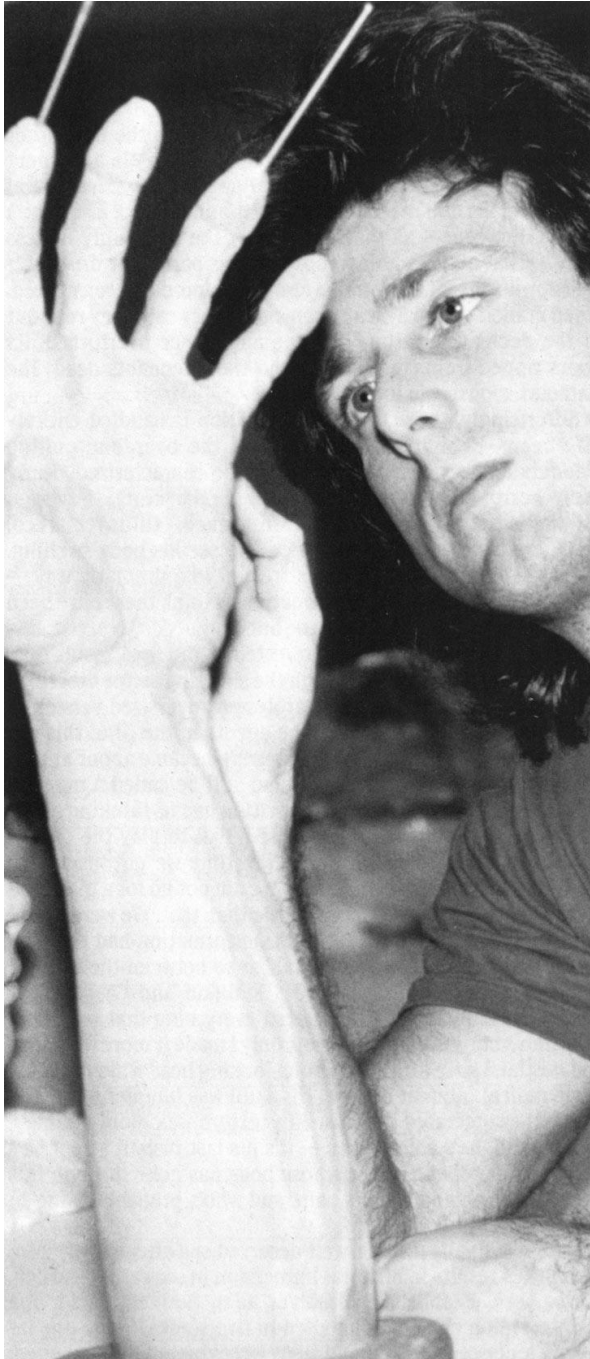


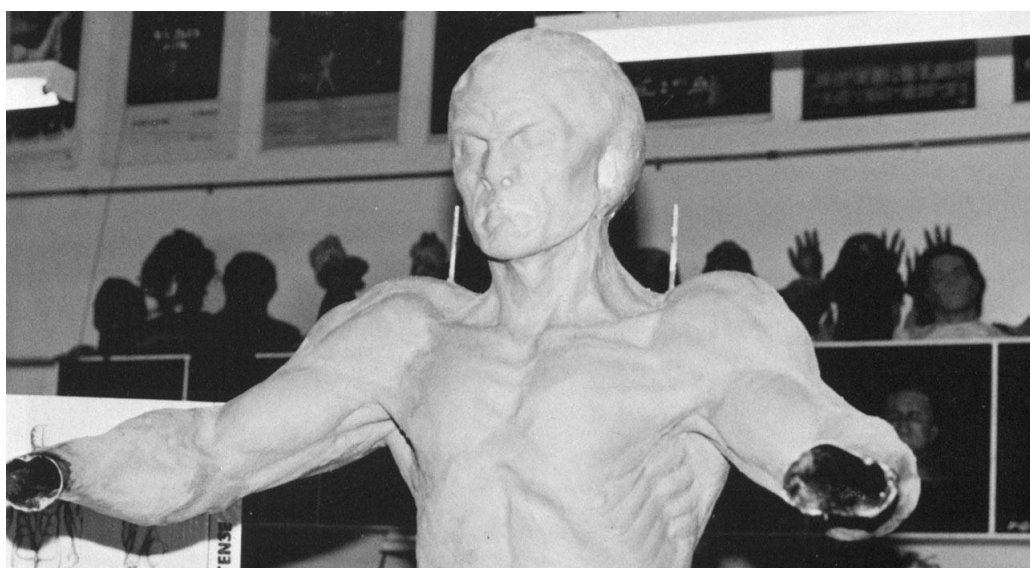














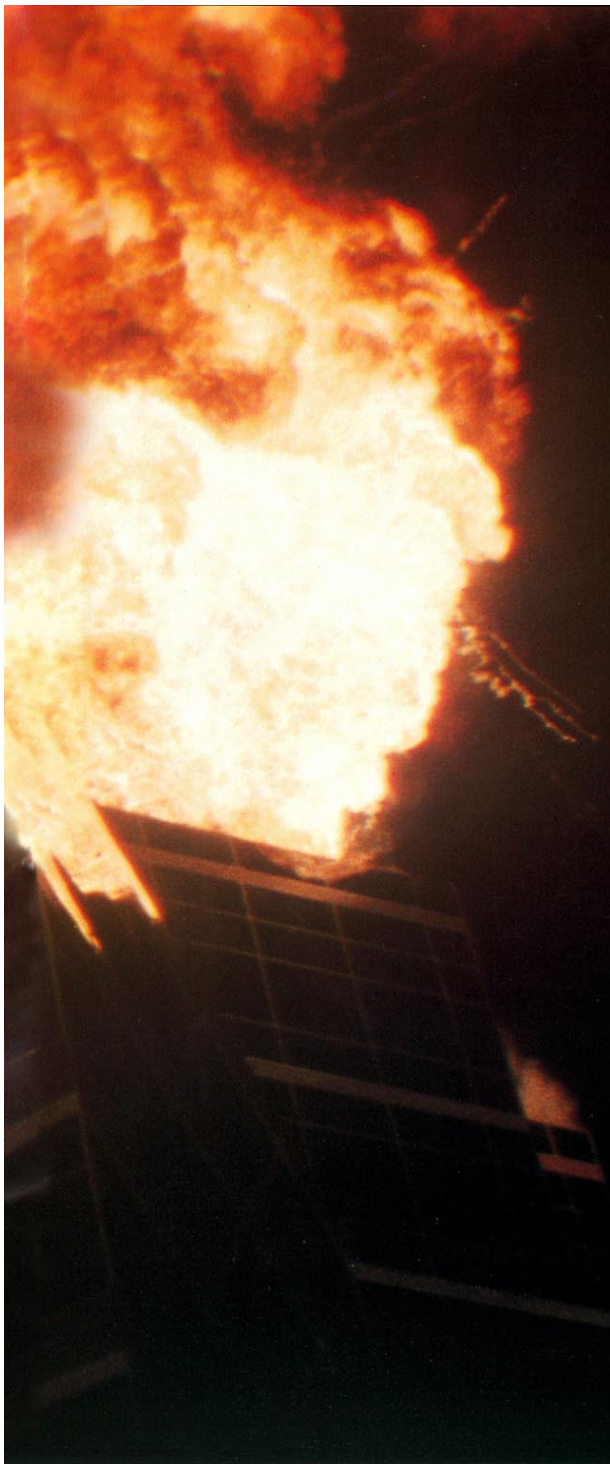
put our transformation appliances on a nothing at all like Terence — he had a put the pieces on him anyway, but I put makeup looks as good as it would have worn it.”

The Harcourt transformation occurs climax of *Alien Nation* when the drug of defiance and desperation — swallow quantity of his own narcotic. Little do they realize, however — as they carry away body — that aliens who overdose on the transform into a faster, more ferocious. When Francisco and Sykes get an emergency to the docks where they find the armor doors ripped from their hinges and the Harcourt monster is loose!

Surprisingly, the actual transformation off-screen — a welcome respite from bladders and spastic cabling that have every horror film since *The Howling*, lurking in the darkness already transformed “so there is no actual scene where you I think it’s better that this was treated personally, I’m tired of transformations some excellent ones in the past, but what more? We were much more interested in watching it happen.” Although the show the transformed Harcourt as a grotesque the alien design, like most of the effect was softened. Consequently, the makeup tie as a monster makeup can be and so makeup. “The way the script was written getting a huge actor like Kevin Peter [but that was all scaled down by the] sculpting the transformation suit. We did Ferrigno ‘Hulk’ — it was more subtle than what limited by the fact that the transformation in the period of an hour-and-a-half or overdoses and the time he faces Pat docks. Basically, I just exaggerated even in Stamp’s normal phase makeup, only I and bestial. I gave him a tumorous-looking some radical internal change. His skull features exaggerated and his skin texture. In my mind, he’s a dead man — it’s his become this psycho junkie whose body transformation and all this pain, and who die anyway.”

Harcourt finally meets a well-deserve





Exaggerate Reality

article by
Adam

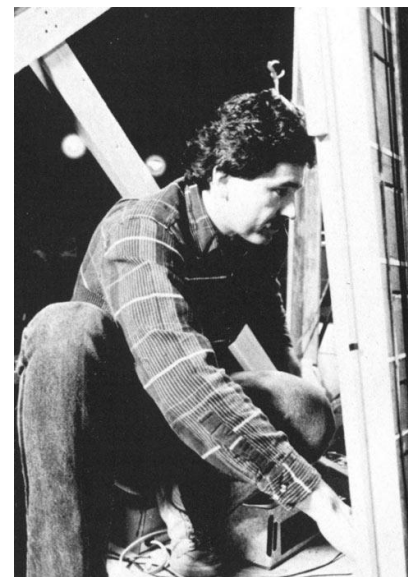
Christmas Eve becomes hell night for detective John McClane (Bruce Willis) whose estranged wife is among those taken hostage by terrorists in a Los Angeles high-rise office building. Though most of Die Hard was shot on location at the new Fox Plaza building in Century City, several key sequences required visual effects produced by Boss Film Corporation. / For a scene in which a makeshift bomb is dropped down an elevator shaft, model shop crew chief Patrick McClung supervised the construction of a forced perspective miniature twenty-three feet tall. / Fully assembled on the effects stage, the wood-framed masonite structure reached nearly to the ceiling. / With color enlargements for reference, modelmaker Kent Gebro pieces together a section of the forced perspective shaft. / In the Boss Film parking lot, model shop supervisor Mark Stetson, visual effects producer Richard Edlund, effects director of photography Bill Neil, director John McTiernan and

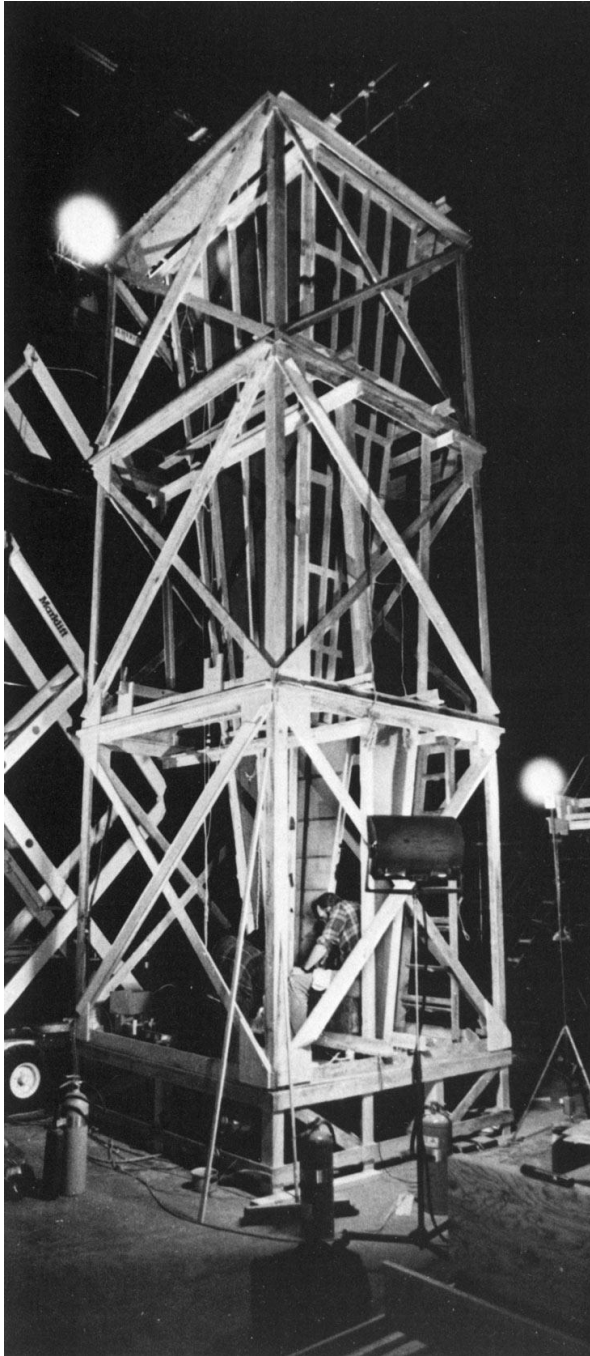
In the hit thriller, *Die Hard*, Bruce Willis plays New York City cop John McClane, who travels to Los Angeles to spend Christmas with his estranged wife and their kids. 'Tis the season to be jolly, and McClane gives it his best shot; but he soon finds himself trapped in a high-rise office building where his spouse and her coworkers are being held hostage by master criminal Hans Gruber and a gang of international terrorists. Avoiding capture himself, McClane quickly becomes the hostages' lone hope for survival as he launches a one-man counterattack on the terrorists — battling not only the genius of Gruber, but also the incompetence of a Los Angeles deputy police chief and agents of the FBI.

At the center of *Die Hard*'s action is the building in which it is set — the national headquarters of the fictional Nakatomi Corporation depicted on film by the new Fox Plaza building in Los Angeles. Located just behind the Twentieth Century Fox studio lot, the Fox Plaza is a high-tech marvel, a stunning thirty-four story tower overlooking most of Beverly Hills. For *Die Hard*, director John McTiernan and producers Lawrence Gordon and Joel Silver were given almost carte blanche use of the structure, still partially under construction inside. However, when the script called for the third floor to explode outward and the rooftop to go up in a giant fireball, the filmmakers had to turn somewhere else — to visual effects producer Richard Edlund and his team at Boss Film Corporation.

"We had blown the top off of a building before in *Ghostbusters*," Edlund explained, "but this film required a much different approach. *Ghostbusters* was a comedy fantasy, an effects movie in which our work was showcased. *Die Hard* on the other hand is not an effects picture. It is an action film in which the effects could not look like effects at all. Our work needed to look as real as possible to blend in with the many physical effects and full-size explosions done by production effects chief Al Di Sarro. Integrated effects. At the same time, however, producer Joel Silver wanted our shots to be as dynamic as possible and exude 'exaggerated reality.' That was his motto: 'ER' — exaggerated reality. That was what we wanted here — and ultimately, I think the movie is chock full of it."

In *Die Hard*, several effects sequences — designed by visual effects art director Brent Boates — embody the ER philosophy. The first comes about halfway through the film when Los Angeles police make an ill-advised assault on the building. During the attack, the police send in an armored car which the terrorists quickly destroy by launching a small missile from an upper story window. Enraged by this brutality, McClane decides to give the terrorists a taste of their own medicine. Strapping a bundle of explosives he had captured earlier onto a chair, he hurls the makeshift bomb down an elevator shaft and blows out most of the third floor.











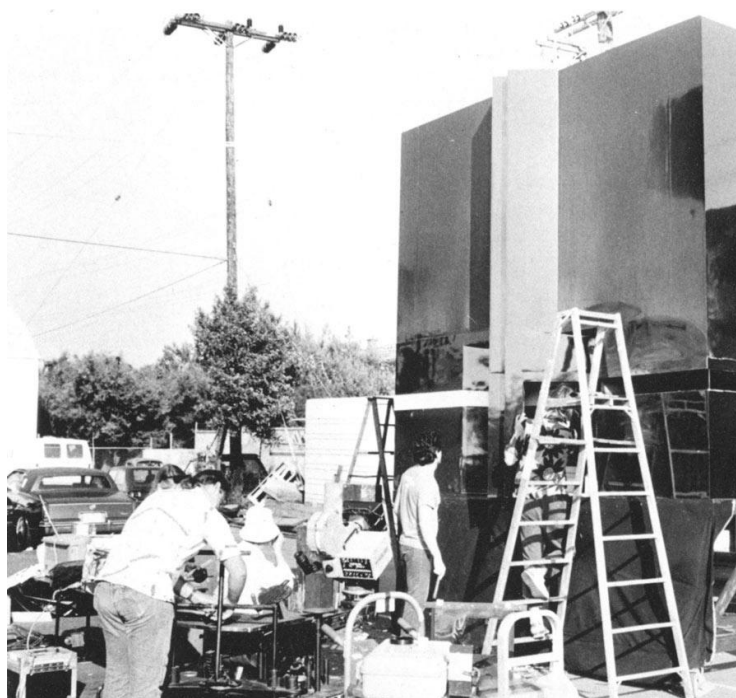
planned and when McClane manages to intervene, the hostages are saved but the roof goes up in flames.

The sequence begins with the approach of two helicopters which fly briskly through the streets of Century City and then climb into position over the Nakatomi landing pad. The low-level street shots were filmed on location by the main unit, but shots of the helicopters hovering above the Fox Plaza called for a different approach. "This was a case where we did an effects shot because we wanted to get a helicopter real close to the principal actors and the extras without putting anyone in danger," Boates explained. "First we shot a plate on the roof with the actors and explosive squibs rigged to simulate machine gun fire. Then we went out to Indian Dunes and shot a real helicopter against a night sky. It was the same helicopter used for the flying shots through the streets of Century City. If this film had required a daytime shot, we would have had to do a bluescreen composite — in which case we would probably have had to use a model. But this was at night, so it really didn't matter where the helicopter was filmed — all that mattered was where it flew in the frame."

To photograph the helicopter, Neil and camera operator Clinton Palmer stood atop scaffolding erected some ten feet off the desert floor to keep the rotor blades from kicking dust up into the air. To gain extra height for certain shots, the scaffolding was stacked on top of a grip truck. "It was a little bit scary because we were really close to the chopper when it was flying over our heads," Neil recalled. "But we had an excellent pilot — Charles A. Tamburro. He was very much in control of the ship, and he would tell us if something we were asking for was not so safe. I felt really confident in his flying. A couple of times when the situation was not quite right, he would fly on by without trying to do his maneuver."

With only moments to spare, McClane convinces the hostages gathered on the rooftop to climb back down into the building. Then with alarm he realizes that armed agents inside the helicopter think he is one of the terrorists. In a hail of bullets McClane darts across the roof, well aware that the whole area is going to blow at any second. In a last-ditch effort to save himself, he lashes a fire hose around his chest and leaps over the side of the building just as the rooftop erupts in flame. Caught in the blast and crippled, the helicopter tumbles off the edge of the building and explodes.

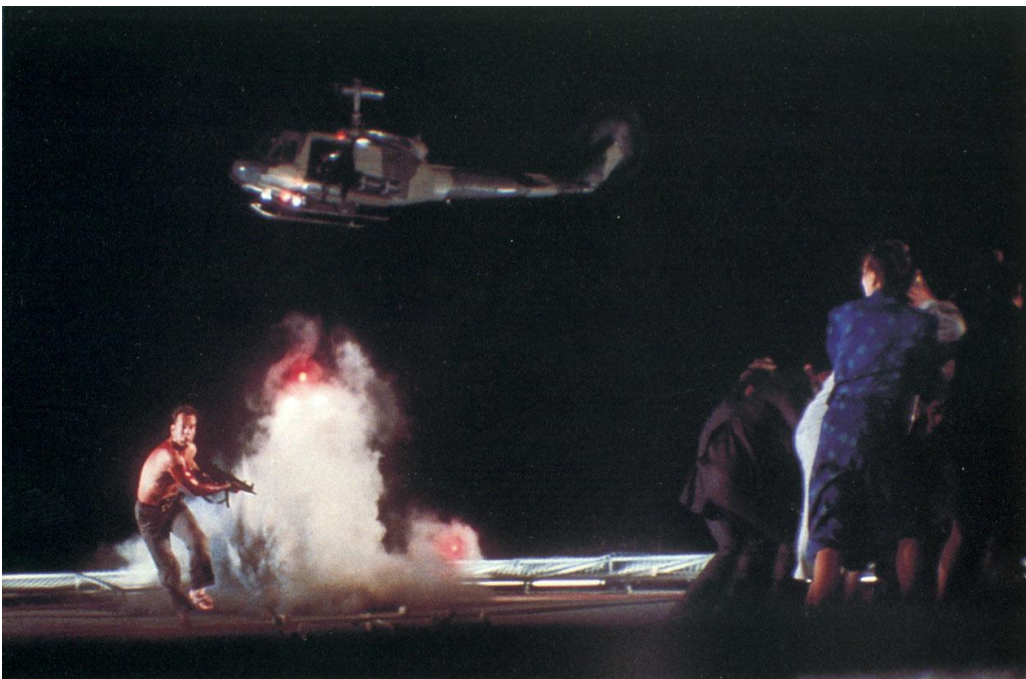
Unlike the third floor blowout scene, the destruction of the helicopter was planned from the start as a miniature to be photographed directly in 35mm without subsequent optical



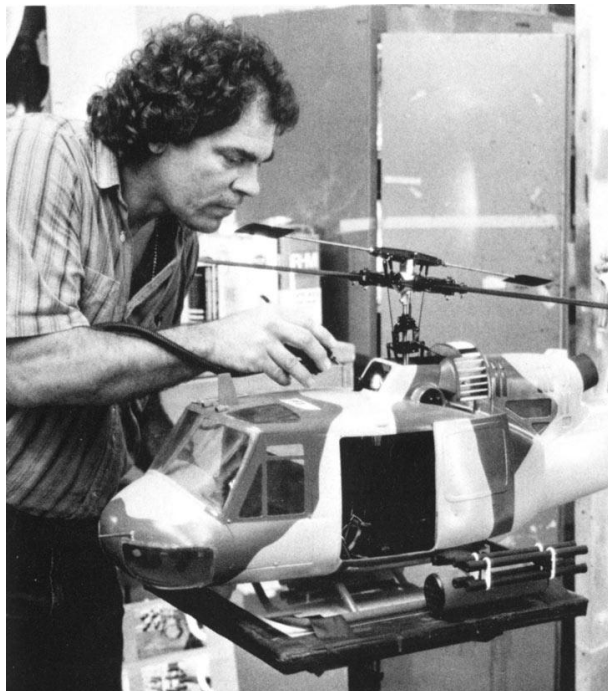
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To photograph the helicopter, Neil and camera operator Clinton Palmer stood atop scaffolding erected some ten feet off the desert floor to keep the rotor blades from kicking dust up into







oped around an existing mechanical package. To modify the helicopter for our needs, we hired an expert radio control pilot, Larry Jolly, who was great to work with. He ended up molding the body of the chopper and built it out of lightweight woven cloth fiberglass designed for breakaway. Then we had to make some mechanical alterations. The action called for us to sever the tail boom off of the helicopter and then have the main fuselage blow. To do that we had to cut our helicopter in half right behind the engine. Then we added a free-sliding spline joint in the tail rotor flex shaft so that Thaine would be able to split the helicopter in two with a pyro charge of reasonable size. We also brightened up the running and search lights on the helicopter."

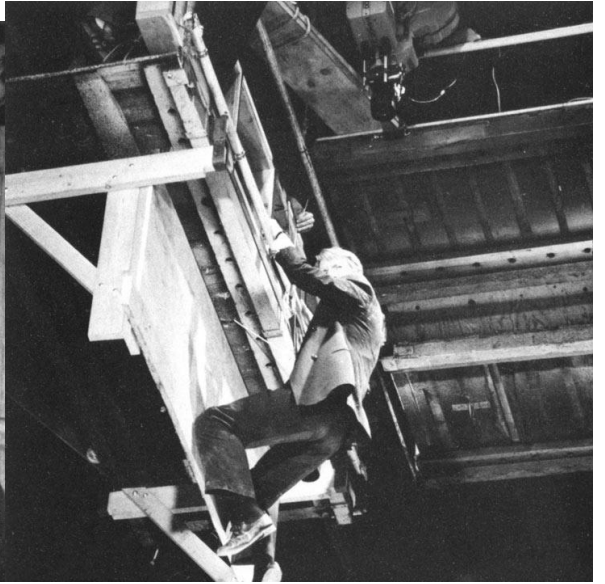
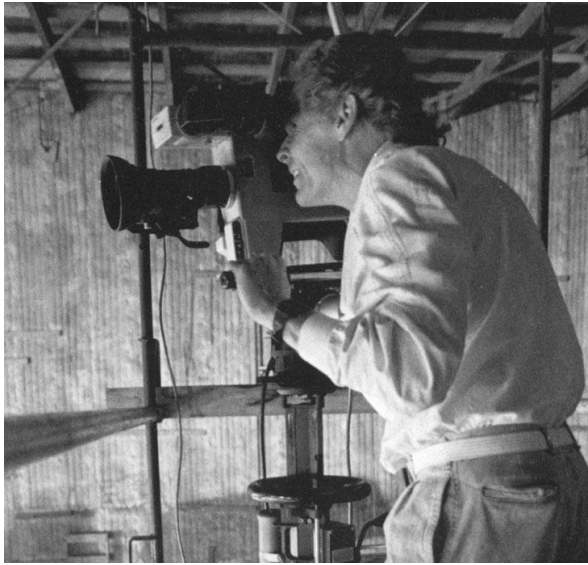
The building miniature — scaled to the unique dimensions of the helicopter model — was seventeen feet high. Erected on a pipe rig twelve feet above the Boss Film parking lot, the tower rose a total of twenty-nine feet into the air. When finished, the model — constructed from plywood, aluminum and plexiglass — was detailed with photo pasteups of granite texture. "Virgil Mirano went over to the actual building site and photographed representative stills of the side of the building," said Stetson. "Then we pasted those on in strips. If we were to do such a project again, I think it would be almost an even tossup between actually painting the texture on or doing the photo printing technique. The photos did give us a real nice finish on the side of the building — and it would have been maybe a little bit harder to get that consistently with paint — but on the other hand, Ron Gress is such a great painter that I am sure he could have done it. In fact, he was doing a lot of touchup on the granite texture anyway. To help match the scale, we also paid close attention to little details like the window frames and things like that."

With the miniature completed, the focus now shifted to executing the complicated rooftop and helicopter explosions. "We didn't want to just nuke the chopper," Morris explained. "We wanted to cut it off at the tail rotor, let the blade go down in flames, have the boom pivot toward the building and then make the rest of the fuselage explode and crash to the ground — and we could have no strings attached. It was a tough order. Kelly Kirby, Kerry Owens and I rigged the chopper so that the tail boom would be separated from the fuselage by 7.5 grain primer cord, and then three small naphthalene explosions would follow closely to mask the fact that it was a model. A throwaway timer was constructed to fire the devices upon being energized. When we turned on the battery, it would fire one, count five, fire another, count five and fire again. We were firing them at .004 seconds apart."

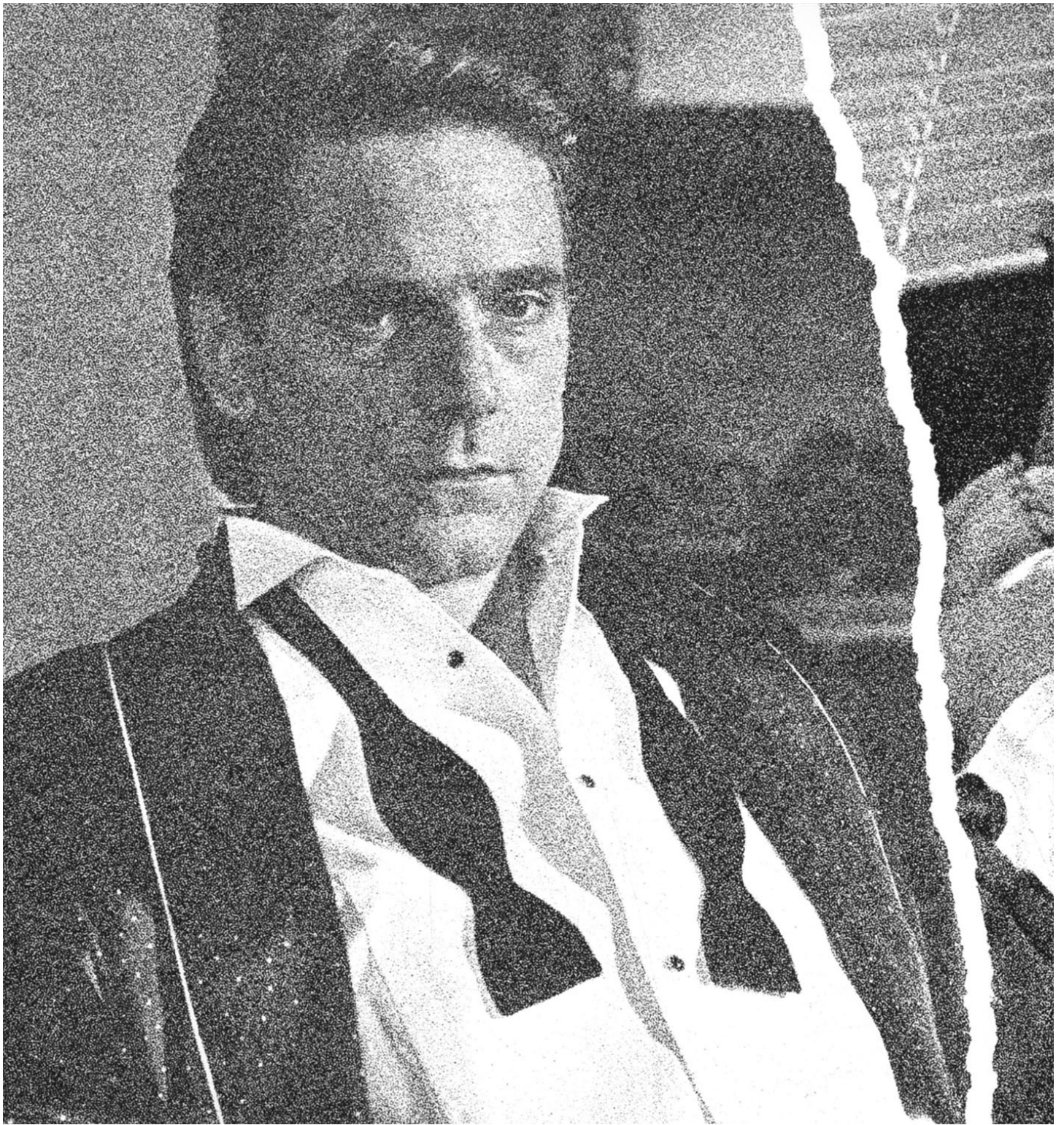
To set off the initial explosion inside the model, a tether line was run from the helicopter to the miniature skyscraper. When

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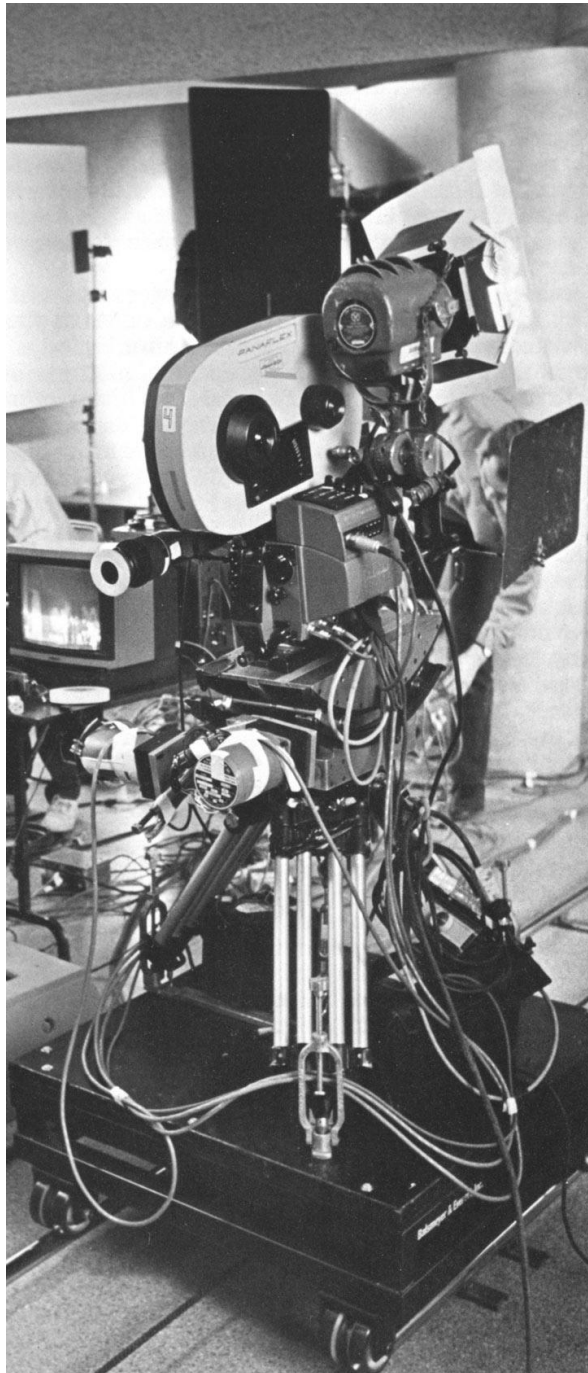
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sets for the largely interior-based film were constructed under the supervision of production designer Carol Spier. By mid-summer of the following year, however, De Laurentiis suffered the first of a series of financial setbacks that would eventually cost him his production company. *Twins* was a casualty of the times. With a million dollars worth of sets nearly completed, Boyman and Cronenberg took over the warehouse lease and rented out portions of it to meet expenses while looking for alternate financing. Ultimately, Twentieth Century Fox — extremely pleased with the boxoffice performance of *The Fly* — came to the rescue.

Funding was not the only problem that plagued the production. For a long while Cronenberg was unable to find an actor of stature willing to play the dual lead. "My first instinct was to set the film in Toronto and have either a Canadian or an American actor play the part. Toronto has a very heavy medical presence and a lot of very innovative things are done here, so it was perfectly feasible to have these celebrated fertility specialists operating out of this city. But I did have trouble casting it, as I had with *The Fly*. The films that I make tend to be very scary ones for actors. A lot of people's first reaction would be, 'Well, wouldn't any actor love to play twins?' In fact, though, what we found was that while some of them liked the idea at first blush, when they started to see how hard it was and how technically demanding it was going to be they began to back away. It's a very schizophrenic experience to play twins properly — and because these twins are so real, it's even more schizophrenic. Then, of course, there was the nature of the thing — the fact that it's bizarre and it's gynecologists. The current generation of American actors tends still to be in the macho street-smart mold. They don't mind playing killers and maniacs, but to play a gynecologist really scares them. We had the same problem when we were trying to hustle the film and get it going. A number of potential backers said to us: 'Well, can't they be lawyers?' And I said: 'If you think they can be lawyers, then you obviously don't get it because it's also about sexuality and it's about men and women and a lot of other things. It is of the essence that they be gynecologists.' Anyway, all these things combined with the normal problems of availability and scheduling and so on meant that we had to finally give up the idea of a North American actor and start looking elsewhere. Because the language is important to me — because my characters tend to be very articulate and witty and quick — I didn't want to consider a French actor or a German actor or an Italian actor and risk having to deal with any problems in that regard. So that meant England. And when I started thinking England, then Jeremy Irons was absolutely my first choice."

A consummate stage actor with a handful of distinguished film credits, Jeremy Irons was indeed taken with the prospect





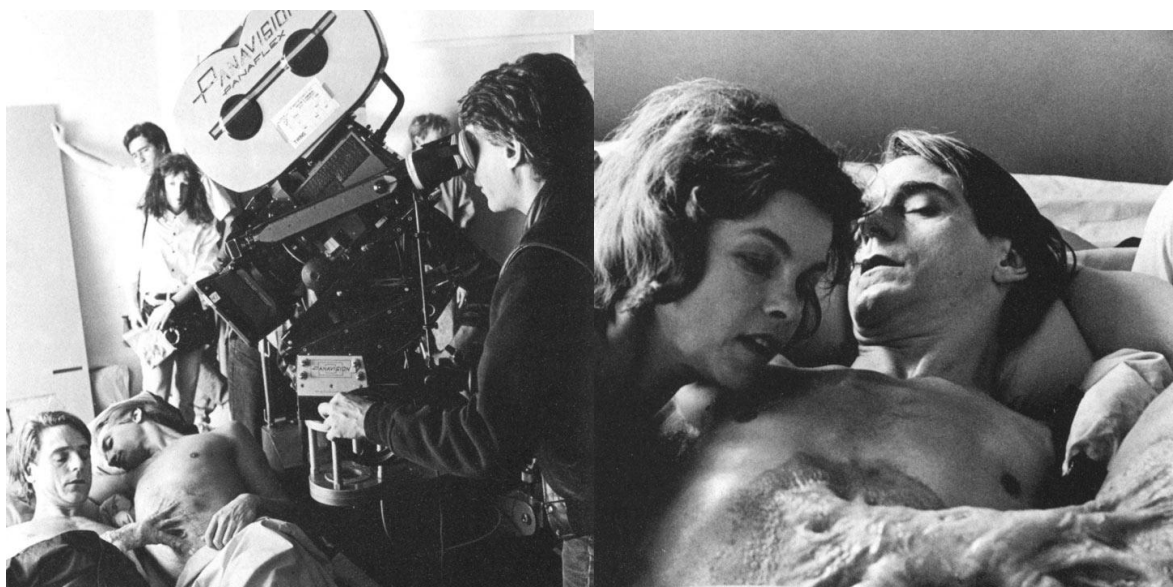
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try doing it across the split line. If it worked, it seemed to me that it would be a really convincing way of blending the two sides together. We decided to try it in the sequence where the brothers are waiting to hear what the medical board plans to do after Beverly goes berserk in the operating room. Beverly is rocking himself on a day bed while Elliot is on the phone. We did a slight pan from Beverly in the background to Elliot in full closeup and pulled focus at the same time—and the shot came out wonderfully. Another of my favorites is in the clinic storage room when Elliot first discovers that Beverly is over the edge and hallucinating about mutant women. The scene is played in closeup—very tense and very dramatic—and the camera pans from Elliot to Beverly and then back again. Conceptually it was quite simple—and perhaps all the more effective for just that reason. If we had been dealing with two actors instead of just one, no one would have even thought twice about it.”

True to form and intent, Cronenberg worked out his twinning shots on set even when the motion control unit was involved. One shot, however—the final twin shot in the film—did require some preplanning. Elliot—benignly butchered by his brother—lies propped against a wall in one of the clinic examination rooms. Draped across his legs—also dead—is Beverly. “For the death scene,” said Wilson, “we had to split Jeremy in half. Since there is a sheet partially covering Elliot, we took that sheet and molded it to stay rigid. The bulk of it was actually loose-fitting, but the area around his chest was molded and bolted firmly to the set. For the first part of the shot, we put a body double under the sheet and had Jeremy as Beverly draped over his lap in the fetal position. Then we removed the body double entirely—he was no longer needed since we already had the bottom half of the frame—and then we had Jeremy as Elliot slide into position under the sheet so we could film the top half. We did two alternate versions. One was a long shot—stationary—and the other was a shot that began tight on Elliot at the top and then tilted down to Beverly on the bottom. Later, in the optical phase, we were able to rotoSCOPE a matte off the stationary portion of the sheet and just pull it through the frame during the tilt.”

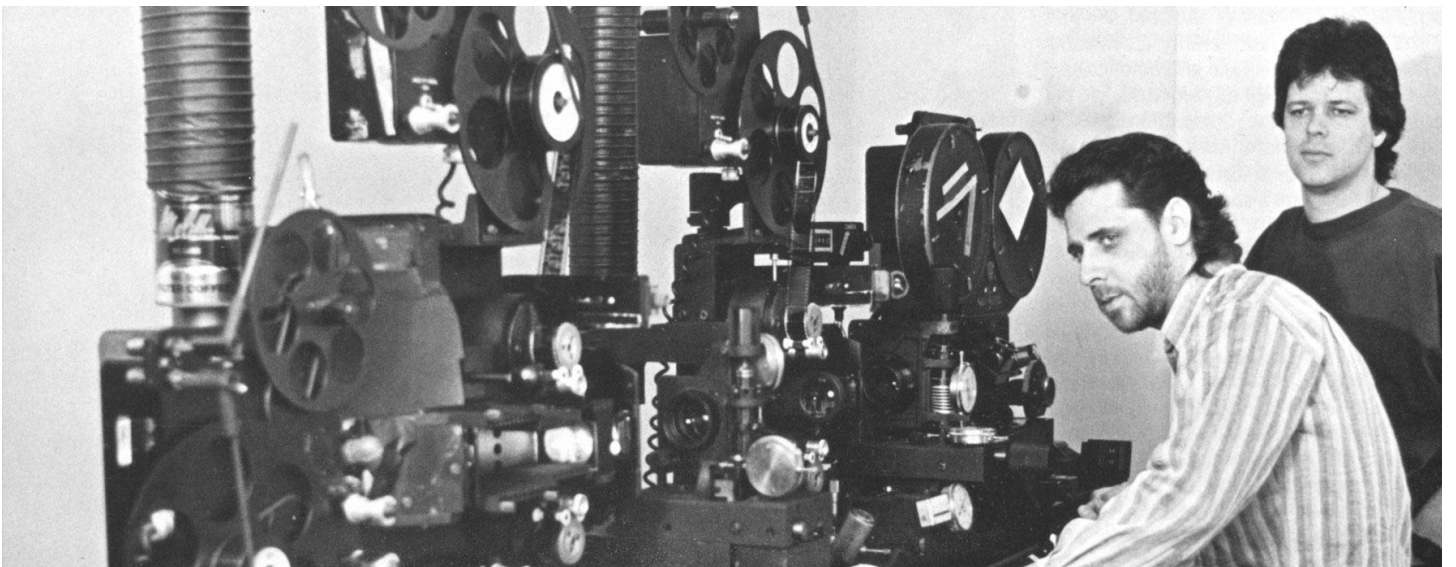
Although the on-set video was an invaluable tool, it offered only a rough approximation of how the twinning shots would eventually look. Since final composites were still many months away, an intermediate step was deemed essential. “After each twinning shot, David would see the elements in rushes and decide which ones he wanted to use. On the set he would

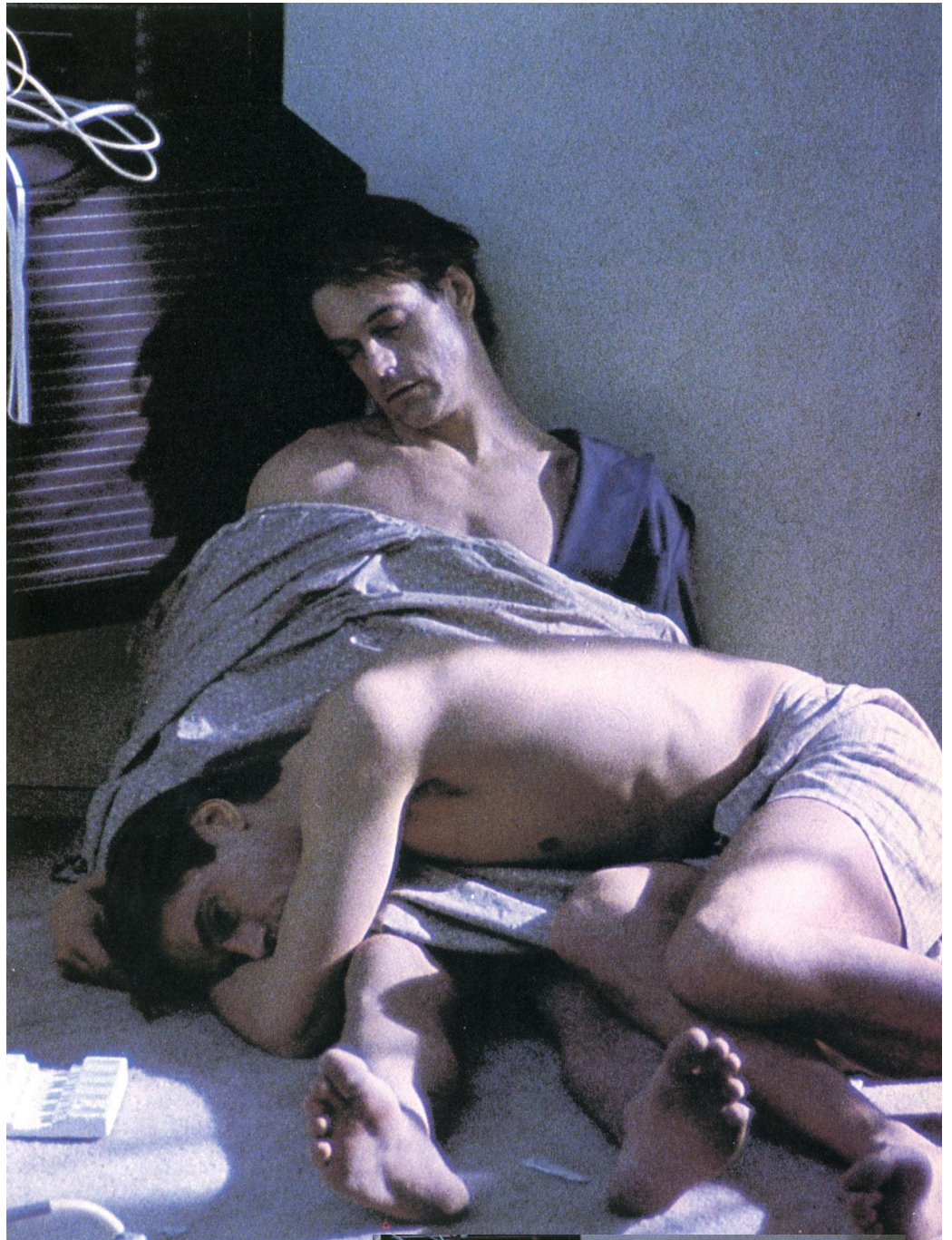


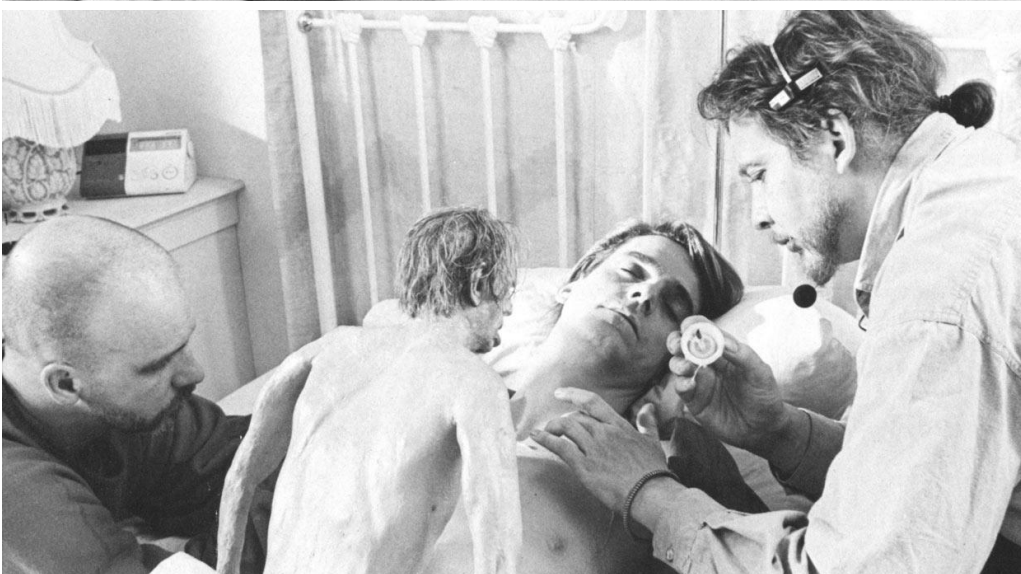
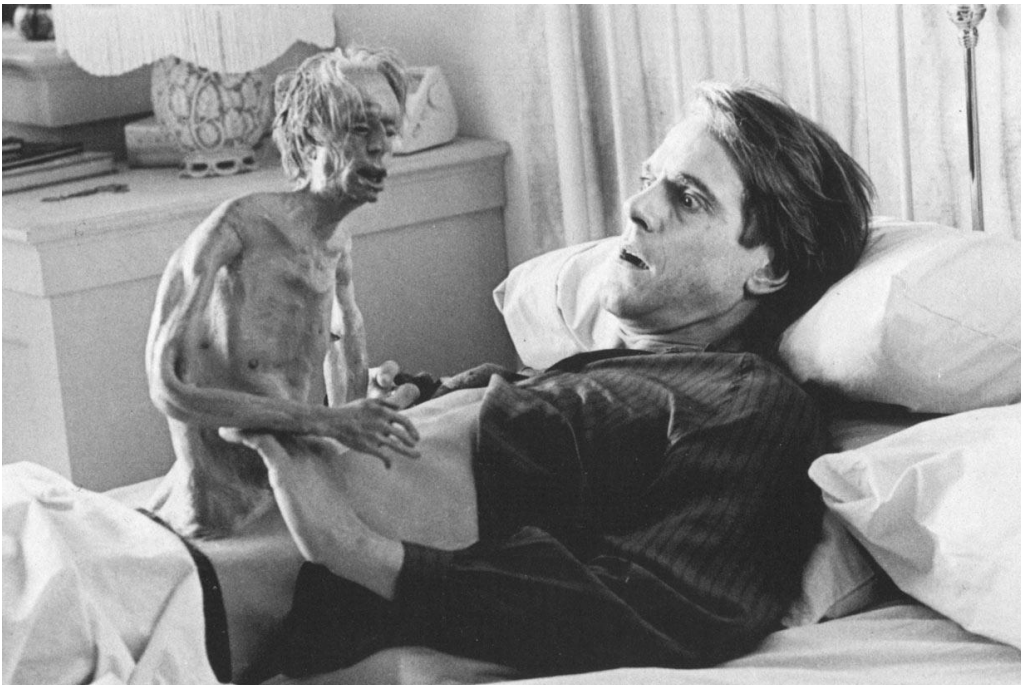
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I screened the film without it, I felt ratl thing was missing. Curiously though, th in the script about Chang and Eng an twins — none of which I wrote or even t dream sequence sparked it. So even if I h its influence would still have been felt si that the brothers think of themselves first figuratively and then literally as tl

Principal photography was complete thereafter elements for the split-screer filtering into Film Effects. Almost none produce the preliminary color slashes finished composite phase. Everything from scratch. "As each twin shot was e said Wilson, "John Furniotis and I woul split needed to go and then map out a o progressed. In the static shots, all we h the characters' movements within the fr by no means simple since we wanted t around as much as possible and not be control shots — since the characters an ing — it was somewhat more difficult t adjusting the split line continuously. Sc the split across, though more often tha it in and out and step it across the fram Once the shot was mapped out, hi-con non-Jeremy sides were created and the were sandwiched together. From a pure there was nothing terribly innovative t positing stage, although John and his p some nice refinements."

Most significant among the refinemer of two interpositives to reduce grain ac tical duping. "Grain was a major concer niotis, "primarily because we were usi opposed to a larger format such as 65mm the way a dupe ends up looking on th on the original photography. For this r a number of tests with Peter Suschitz exposures should be used on the set. In : that the best way to keep our shots original photography as possible was to stop-and-a-half or so. Even then, a coupl a considerable amount of grain in then two interpositives on one shot to see basically do two runs at fifty percent ex to a full normal exposure. Of course the negative was still there, but we found t positives we were able to greatly redu



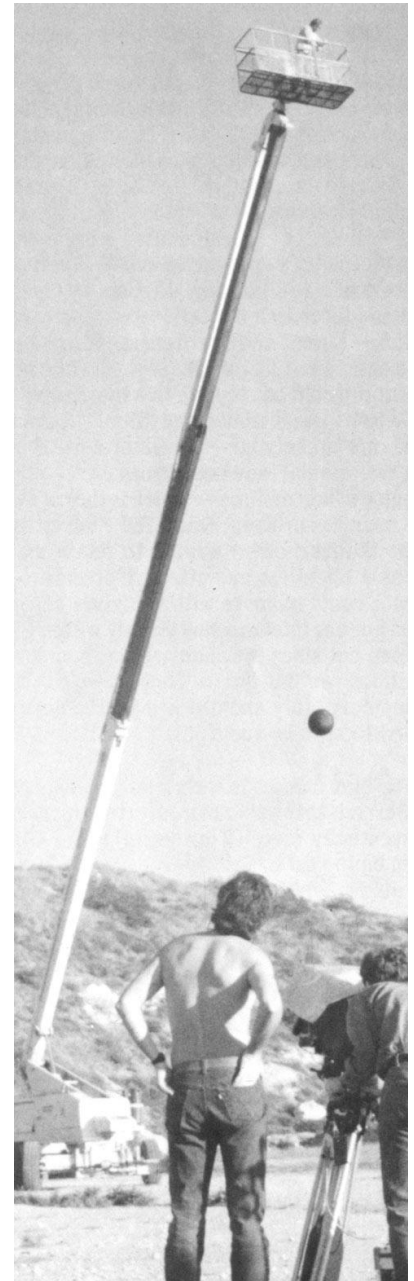
**THE RIGHT BLOB
FOR THE RIGHT JOB**

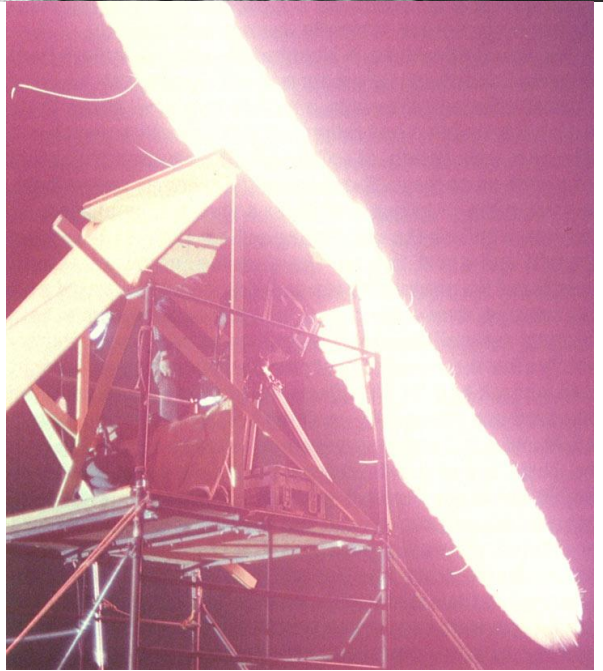
In The Blob — an updated remake of the bargain basement classic — director Chuck Russell orchestrated an effects extravaganza involving some of the top talent in the field. Dream Quest Images — under visual effects supervisor Hoyt Yeatman — was responsible for optical and miniature effects. Included among them were scenes of the blazing meteorite that delivers the Blob to earth. For a dramatic introductory shot, a plexiglass ball covered with pyrotechnic material was suspended from a crane, then elevated, ignited and released in a giant arc that passed directly over the camera. / A subsequent shot was similarly obtained by sliding the fiery orb down a wire. / First to discover the Blob is an old can collector (Billy Beck) whose hand is engulfed in a searing mass of malevolent goo. / Makeup effects for the film were created by Tony Gardner. Among the most grisly was the dissolved body of the

be operated by puppeteers — similar to the 'vine' technology used in *Little Shop*. Because of its ever-changing size and the various actions it would be called upon to perform — compounded by the fact that it would be employed in both miniature and live-action situations — numerous Blob puppets had to be constructed throughout the production schedule. Essentially, each puppet was fashioned from pieces of pre-dyed silk that were sewn together — somewhat like a quilt — to form random sized pouches two to four inches wide. Blood veins were airbrushed on; and immediately before shooting, the quilt was injected with methylcellulose — the effects industry standard for slime which was originally developed as a thickening agent for such diverse products as shampoos and milkshakes. "We went through hundreds of gallons of methocel," noted visual effects supervisor Hoyt Yeatman. "The stuff is primarily water — and water weighs a lot. Also it is very slippery and yet it dries like glue. As soon as we filled the pouches they started to ooze — so we constantly had to keep topping them off or else get new ones. It was kind of like trying to shoot ice cream that's always melting."

"Once methocel was mixed with water," added Fink, "and made to kick into a gel with a small amount of ammonia, it was nearly impervious to cleanup. The gel would get stiffer with cold water, more slippery with hot water and would pretend to go away when hit with a steam cleaner — only to come back if you got the spot wet again. It stuck when it shouldn't have and it slid when you'd think it couldn't. It ate away at the asphalt parking lot, stripped paint from miniatures, gagged puppeteers and made slipping and falling standard procedure. If anything was close to Chuck Russell's intent for the Blob, it was the material from which it was made."

As conceived and executed by Conway and crew, the various Blob manifestations were operated in a very direct way — primarily by puppeteers positioned underneath manipulating the forms with hands and feet and bodies. Unfortunately, the approach which had produced such splendid results in *Little Shop of Horrors* proved to be awkward and impractical during principal photography of *The Blob*. The extreme bulk of the methocel quilts — some weighing hundreds of pounds — made it difficult for the puppeteers to manage them in any controllable sense, especially through holes concealed in the set or even, on occasion, underwater. In the end, time and budget constraints both worked against the technique. "Although we had done some preliminary tests with different materials and techniques," explained Yeatman, "the Blob had not really been worked out totally by the time we started shooting. Nothing seemed just right. We had started with the concept of 'the right Blob for the right job' — meaning that we would make a certain type of Blob to perform a certain function — but because we were short on time, that eventually fell by the wayside. Once







would be a hole in the set and a puppet big bag of goo — and it simply was not

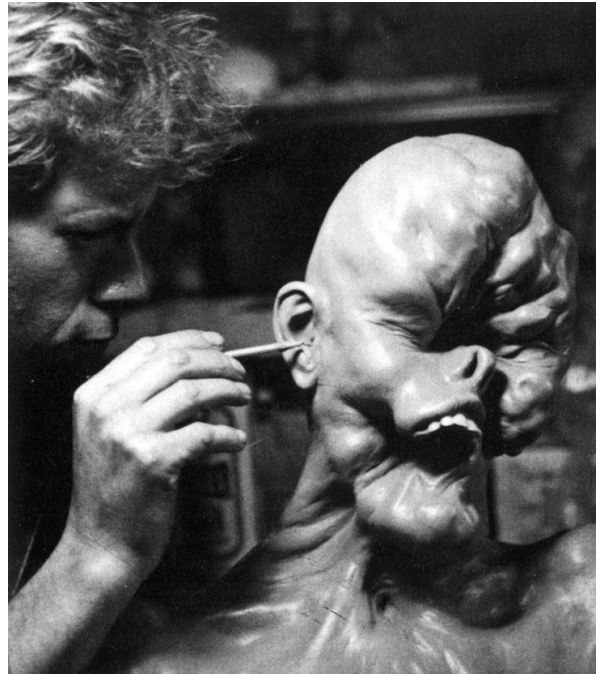
"We would have liked to have had the video," added effects producer Keith. "We creature effects people work out what in advance. Had they had more lead time to develop a wide variety of techniques, it would have gone much faster. But because the we were often receiving a Blob for a second there we were, on the set, finding out it could and could not do." As shoot Russell and his producers became increasingly the creature crew output, and for real practical and political reasons decided to discontinue the completion of principal photography to replace him for the effects-heavy yet ahead was Stuart Ziff — architect of the at ILM and ghost shop supervisor on Gremlins and basic bag-of-goo technique for the established in the film and could not be mented. "Stuart's background and knowledge for effects and his willingness to exploit was invaluable. Stuart also brought in some really strong and talented people such as Mike Weed. There were twenty-four people to the time of Lyle's departure, including time we were at our postproduction peak — about evenly split between puppeteers

"Originally there were not enough skulls used," Ziff stated. "The people who were also being used to operate it — and that's Nothing can substitute for having genuine. One of the many significant things Mike thirty to thirty-five puppeteers with some operate the Blob." Even so, the weight was quite adequately resolved. "We struggled with showing said Fink, "not able to get what we wanted people — up to their eyebrows in methamphetamine quilts." While hand-puppeteering would mechanical devices were employed when necessary: all puppets — was always more 'alive' directly by hand, so we went to mechanical last resort. In some instances we used the Blob to give it movement — mostly surfacing we were unable to get a hand or where the main hands. The main hands were



would be a hole in the set and a puppet big bag of goo — and it simply was not. "We would have liked to have had the use of video," added effects producer Keith Campbell, "but the creature effects people work out what they can do in advance. Had they had more lead time to develop a wide variety of techniques, things would have gone much faster. But because the schedule was so tight, we were often receiving a Blob for a second or third time, there we were, on the set, finding out if it could and could not do." As shoot master John Wood and his producers became increasingly concerned about the creature crew output, and for real practical and political reasons, they decided to discontinue the use of the creature crew immediately after the completion of principal photography and to replace him for the effects-heavy second unit with Stuart Ziff — architect of the creature effects at ILM and ghost shop supervisor on *Gremlins* and *Gremlins 2*. Ziff's basic bag-of-goo technique for the Blob was established in the film and could not be improved upon. "Stuart's background and knowledge of creature effects and his willingness to exploit his imagination was invaluable. Stuart also brought in some of the best creature effects people in the business."

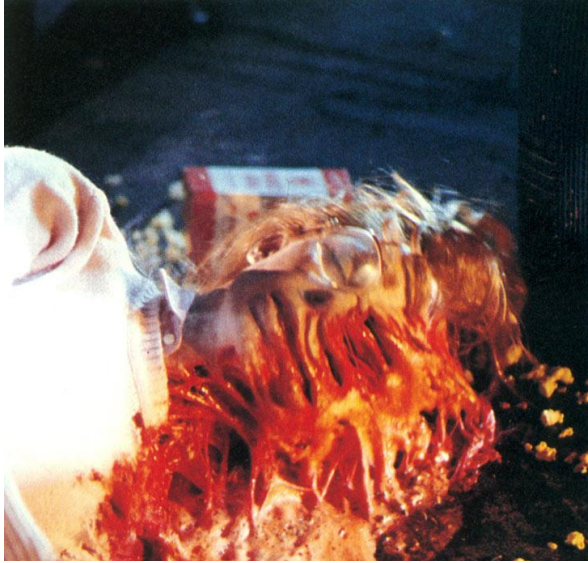










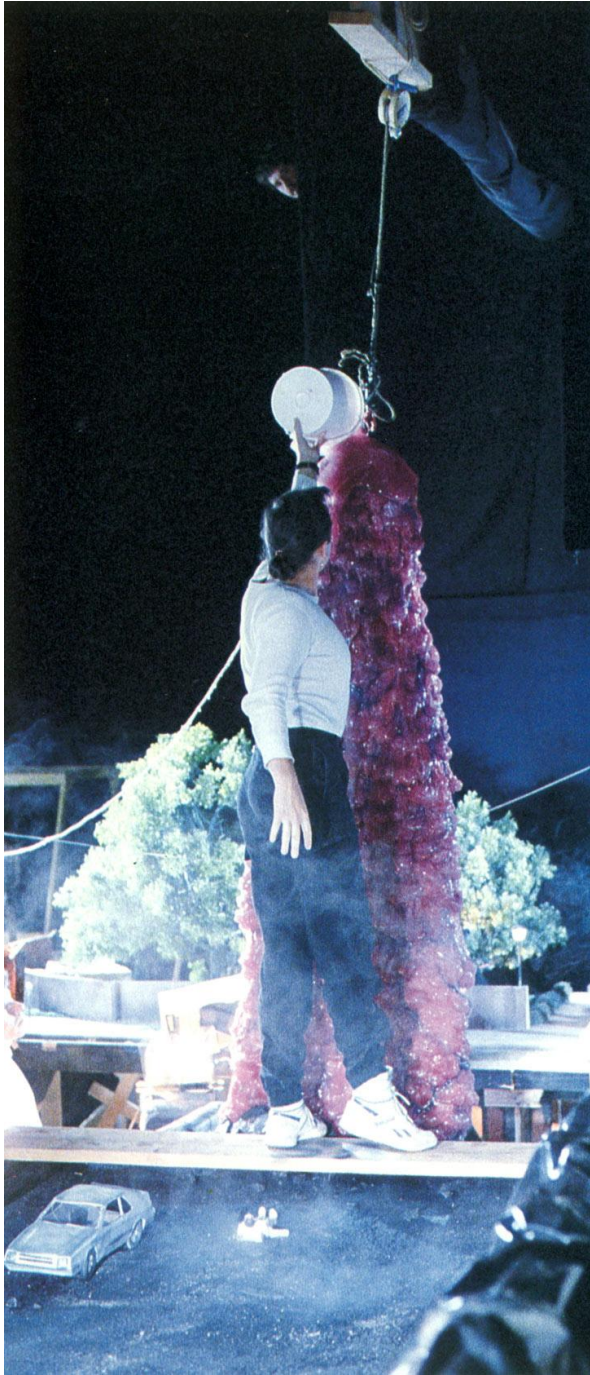


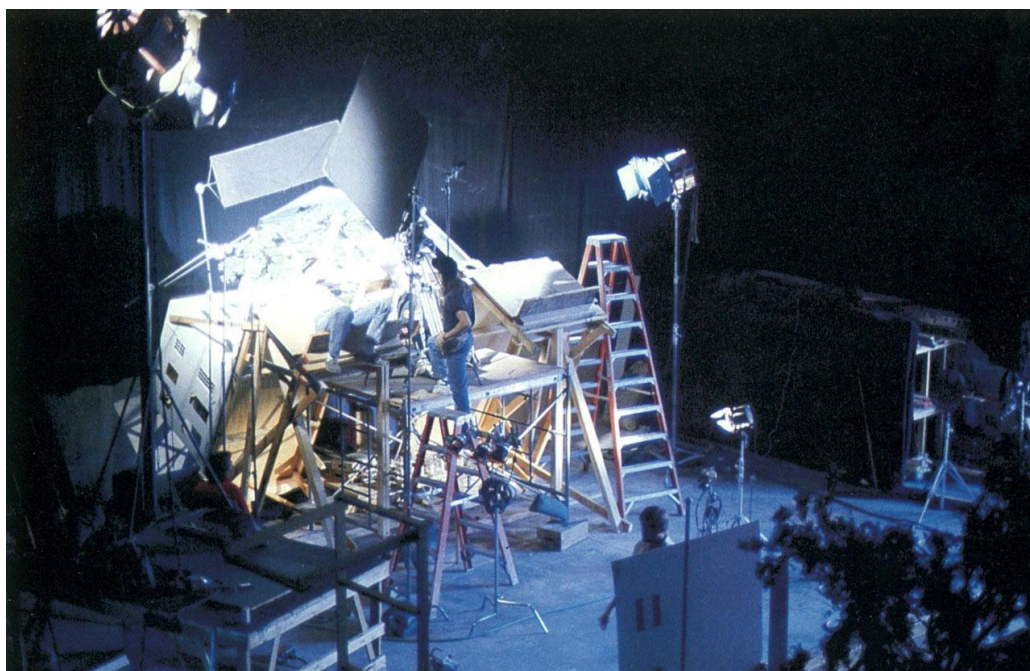
of the sheriff already inside the creature. A large aquarium was built around the figure of the puppet representing the half-consumer merged inside where it was to continue. We experimented with a lot of things like Seltzer to get the dissolving action," Gardner said. "We found that the action itself tended to be what we wanted to see. We realized that we needed something that was controllable and repeatable enough to see through. We experimented with a sink first. Next we went to a fish tank with our sheriff puppet, then a bigger fish tank, an actual tank built for the scene." Though they had built several bodies for the scene, they actually made it into the film. "As the bubble of the glass of the phone booth straight on the face angles into view — the mouth starts caving in and the eyes moving all the time, the impression of skin streaming off his face, the latex skin with elements that would appear — a flexible resin, nylon, some hair and other lightweight and sheer fabrics. We painted light patterns with an airbrush. I wanted a look of milk or colored liquid being pulled apart into chunks of hamburger breaking away." The creature was operated by cables attached to levers and by motors placed outside the tank. "We all wore scuba gear actually in the tank with the amount of hand puppeteering. Bill Stinson built the understructure for the puppet in such a way that we could submerge it in water without damaging it. Scuba divers were directly behind the puppet, operating the mouth and body position. The Blob quilt submerged in the water, the puppet could make its entrance."

The sheriff's deputy had an equally good idea. To secure the town hall where many people sought refuge, Bill Briggs barricaded himself behind a bookshelf. Suddenly a Blob tentacle exploded out of the back of the bookcase, wraps itself around him and proceeds to pull him through the opening. During the process, snapping him in half at the waist. "I took the actual bookcase that was going to be destroyed," said Gardner, "and created a new base for it back at an angle but still support it in



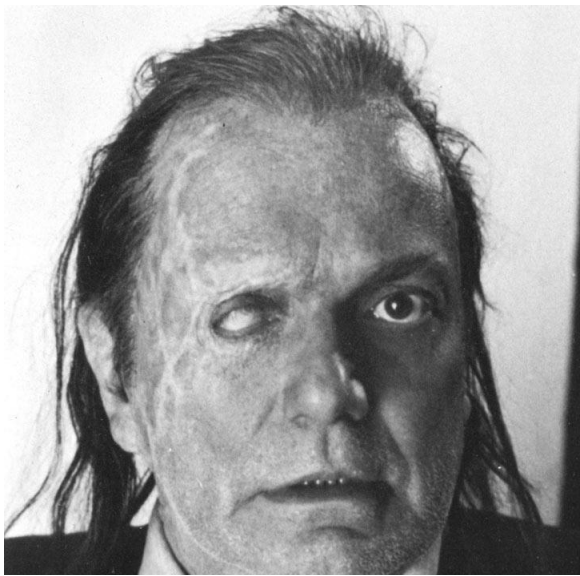
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sensitive Blob. At one point in the action, the cab of the vehicle — completely engulfed by the juggernaut — was to have provided a bizarre vantage point for a closeup view of ingested bodies floating by. "We went to a swimming pool at an apartment complex for our video tests," Gardner recalled. "We rented scuba gear and took our two full-body puppets — basically marionettes — that were controlled by rods and monofilament. They had to float by a very small window surface, each from an opposite direction, immersed in Blob material. It took us about a week-and-a-half to work out the puppeteering for the sequence because we were dealing with neutral buoyancy and a small space. After we had the sequence worked out, it was discovered that the tank that was built to actually accomplish the shot was not reinforced properly. It kept fracturing and finally blew out its bottom — so the shot was cut."

During the final battle, Reverend Meeker is severely burned by a stray flame thrower burst. Not only did Gardner have to create an authentic-looking burn for actor Del Close, he also had to formulate the resulting scar for the film's epilogue which occurs two years later. "We consulted with a plastic surgeon — Stanley P. Frileck in Beverly Hills — to find out what this kind of burn would look like originally and also what it would look like two years later. He let us research photographs and manuals and also consulted with Mike Smithson who was sculpting the piece so that we could make Del's burn makeup as accurate as possible. Most of our makeup effects on the film could look like anything we felt was correct and we could justify our interpretation by saying, 'That's what someone looks like when he's blobbed.' But everyone knows what burns look like, so they had to be convincing." The film ends with Meeker — scarred both physically and mentally — preaching at a tent meeting, warning the assemblage of the Judgment soon to come. During his sermon, the clergyman holds up a jar containing a small quivering piece of the Blob — a souvenir collected from the frozen creature's crystallized remains years before. The effect was achieved by Gary Platek who constructed and puppeteered a prosthetic arm and hand with a wire system inside to actuate the bottled Blob sample. "We shot a plate of Del Close holding a jar," said Yeatman, "and then had him lower it out of the shot. At that point his arm was replaced with the prosthetic arm holding the cable puppet inside the jar — which was combined with the live-action by filming it in front of a rear-projected plate of the reverend."

Burdened with budget limitations, a tight schedule, personnel changes and a leading character that was, in essence, an uncooperative bag of goo, Chuck Russell nonetheless found the experience of remaking *The Blob* a joyful one. "It was very hectic. There was not the usual feeling of satisfaction that you get on a 'normal' film once principal photography wraps, be-

Dressed in maximum puppeteers the Blob for with the truck. Duri will be hidden set, manipulated by hand into the pavement, working be quilts, pup, Stallings ei breath of a / Deputy B when the E around the him bodily bookcase — snapping h process. To desired illu harness wi constructe McCrane. / shelf with straight ou actor was s the ankles first through a maneuver. the false le upward at angle. / For two years events in ti artist Mike solicited gi

